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COMIC & CARD PICKS!

VANTAGE PRESS RELEASE REVIEW

#1000

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- TWO CHAOS EFFECT COMICS!
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Inside information for comic dealers and collectors!

#0

AN INSIDE LOOK AT ZERO HOUR!

AN INTERVIEW WITH DC'S ZERO HOUR EDITOR!

THE ULTIMATE ZERO HOUR CHECKLIST!

PAST PICKS HAVE INCLUDED:

Gen 13 #1! Daredevil: Man Without Fear #1! Sandman Cards!

VANTAGE™
PRESS RELEASE REVIEW
Inside information for comic dealers and collectors!

#1000

contents

SECTION 1 The Vantage Market Guide

Chaos! Zero Hour! Ominous! Grell! Extreme! Arrrrrgh! We're drowning in info & picks!

SECTION 2 Non-Sports Predictions

Non-sports cards: little pieces of cardboard that go for big bucks. Weird.

SECTION 3 Comics Are For Reading First

Read them things or you ain't gonna learn nothin' about readin' & writin'.

SECTION 4 The Future of Comics

Let **Vantage #1000** take you into the future; the computerized future of comics!

SECTION 5 Vantage Viewpoints

Watch us turn red over all those nice things you have to say!

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Vantage: Press Release Review, Volume One, Number One Thousand, (published after #3 and before #4) June 1994.

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Cover: Huntsman TM & © 1994 Chris Claremont
WildC.A.T.S. TM & © 1994 Jim Lee
Brute and Babe TM & © 1994 Bart Sears

MORE THAN MERE COMIC-HEADS

We've begun a massive search for Golden- and Silver-Age experts and writers. We'd like to do a pick list for those old Gold and Silver back-issues, but boy are we having a hard time finding qualified people.

Why? What's the big deal, **Vantage?** Why don't you just hire some comic-head and be done with it?

Because our people are our strength. **Vantage** is the only magazine that actively seeks to fill every position with ACTIVE DOWN-AND-DIRTY dealers. We prefer the small store owner or the successful show dealer. If you can make a profit at a show, selling nothing but back-issues, you obviously know what you are doing. These are the people who make up **Team Vantage** — the people in the foxholes...those who must make their own buying decisions every month, and succeed!

So you see, when you buy an issue of **Vantage**, you're buying something that's unique in comics...a magazine with a truly serious pick list.

We stand behind our track record with pride. Next time you're looking at someone else's Top Ten hottest books list, consider how many of those books were **Vantage** picks beforehand. Picks like: **Green Lantern #48-50, Ninjak #1, Daredevil: Man Without Fear #1, Exiles #4, Prime #2, Dark Horse Presents #80, Wolverine #75, Platt Moon Knight, Gen 13 #1,** and many more. Plus, of course, there's our well-respected ability to get the news out first.

This special one thousandth issue is more than just a gimmick between issues #3 and #4. It's a celebration of the fact that this is a forward-looking magazine! Are you ready to ride the crest of the wave? Or are you content sitting in its wake? Come and join us for news and picks that are two steps ahead of the game!

—Rob Golub

Top Picks of the Month

Chaos Effect Omega (Valiant/Chaos Effect)
Valor #12-up (DC/Zero Hour)

More Vantage Picks

Batman/Punisher: Lake of Fire (DC)
Brute and Babe — It Begins (Ominous Press)
Chaos Effect Alpha (Valiant/Chaos Effect)
Crisis on Infinite Earths #1-12 (DC back-issues)
The Invisibles #1-up (DC/Vertigo)
Judge Dredd #1-up (DC)
Legionnaires #16-up (DC/Zero Hour)
Legion of Super-Heroes #57-up (DC/Zero Hour)
Secret Weapons #11-up (Valiant/Chaos Effect)
Shaman's Tears #1-2 (Image back-issues)
Shaman's Tears #3-up (Axis)
Shaman's Tears #3 Ashcan (Creative Fire Studios)
Starman Golden Age back-issues (DC)
Violator #1-2 (Image/Todd McFarlane Productions)
WildC.A.T.S. #10-13 (Image/Homage)
Youngblood #6-up (Image/Extreme)

VANTAGE PICK

Watch for the Vantage Star indicating our top picks!

"The above pick list is a guide based on research, advisors' opinions, and staff opinions — keep in mind that even the experts will disagree. Comics can lose standing in the market after months or years. You would be wise to trade or sell books beforehand. Read over the facts and opinions in Vantage, examine the pick list, and then make your own decisions. Remember: 1) There's no sure thing. Never bet the farm on any one book. 2) It may be fun to hunt for winners, but comics are even more fun to read! Open up one of those sealed polybags and give comics a try!"
- Publisher Rob Golub

CHAOS EFFECT INFO AND PICKS

Excuse me, do you have the time?

Valiant does. They've got The Chaos Effect, their new time-jumping mega-event of the summer!

The Chaos Effect will begin in a free sixteen-page comic — The Chaos Effect Alpha — hitting stores in mid-June. Afterwards, there will be an independent four-issue story arc for each of the next four weeks. For example, all four Valiant comics shipping to stores in the third week of June will make up one story arc.

These story arcs will be known as Beta, Gamma, Delta, and Epsilon. For those of you not familiar with the Greek alphabet, you're looking at it. Instead of "A, B, C, D, E, F" it's "Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, Epsilon, and Omega." Why "C" is Gamma instead of, well, "Camma" or something, we have no idea. We don't write these alphabets, we just report on 'em.

It's not necessary for readers to buy the entire Chaos Effect, because each of the four-issue story arcs is designed to stand alone! In fact, each issue in Beta and Gamma will be designed to stand alone!

The entire Chaos Effect story will wrap up in **The Chaos Effect Omega**, due out in late July.

Pinch us. The way that the Chaos Effect has been structured is a **Vantage** dream. Valiant has decided to take some unusual steps in this offering which **Vantage** believes could have a profound effect on advance orders.

Valiant is cleverly invoking memories of their old highly successful Unity promotion by pulling the same kick-off trick. Just as with **Unity #0**, **The Chaos Effect Alpha** is being distributed free to comic shops to get readers into the story. Shops will get **Alpha** in an amount equal to two times their lowest Chaos Effect tie-in order. Retailers can order additional copies at an unusually low price.

Vantage sees great potential in **The Chaos Effect Alpha**. This is the kick-off for The Chaos Effect and future readers will most certainly want it. However, even more important, it should be available for free or next to nothing at your local shop.

Alpha could easily do well but hey, even if you see it in the fifty cent box a month after you picked it up for free, you're

Chaos Effect Logo and Ar
TM & © 1994 Voyager
Communications, Inc.

CHAOS EFFECT INFO AND PICKS

still fifty cents ahead of the game. **The Chaos Effect Alpha** is an easy pick — we're almost shameful. **Vantage** recommends that you check with your local shop in mid-June to find out how it will be distributing these books. The key is to find out how and when, or you will miss this boat.

"A little more strategic is our logic behind making The Chaos Effect Omega a Top Pick of the Month."

A little more strategic is our logic behind making **The Chaos Effect Omega** a Top Pick of the Month. The **Vantage** advisors we have spoken with on this agree that it is highly unlikely that **The Chaos Effect Omega** will be over-ordered.

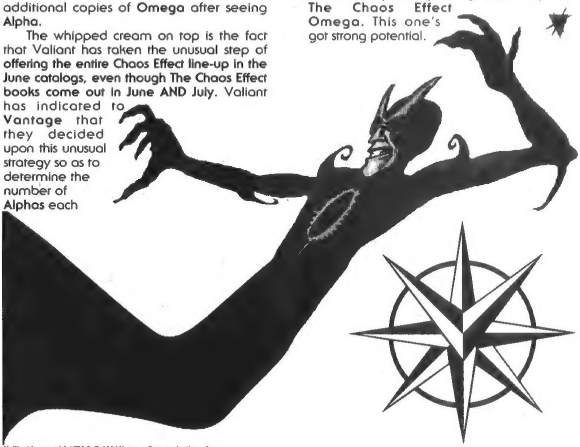
Important: Advance-orderers won't get to see a single Chaos book before they place their orders. That's right, even **Alpha** comes out after orders for **Omega** are already placed. Plus, with only a few weeks between **Alpha** and **Omega**, dealers will have little to no time to "advance-reorder" additional copies of **Omega** after seeing **Alpha**.

The whipped cream on top is the fact that Valiant has taken the unusual step of **offering the entire Chaos Effect line-up in the June catalogs, even though The Chaos Effect books come out in June AND July.** Valiant has indicated to **Vantage** that they decided upon this unusual strategy so as to determine the number of **Alphas** each retailer should get in time to ship, and to save money on advertising.

Imagine that you own a comic shop. You haven't seen any of this Chaos Effect stuff yet. You have 50% more Valiant books to choose from than normal on your June order form. Will the covers be cool? Will the stories be good? Will it sell like hot in your store? Curiosity will sell the first few Chaos Effect books, but how will the rest of them do?

You have no idea, and as a cautious businessperson, you'll order enough copies of later Chaos Effect issues for your regular Valiant readers. Period. For a retailer, that's the right decision. For a show dealer, it may not be.

Watch for the **Chaos Effect Omega** print-run to be relatively low. With its low $2.25 cover price, this book doesn't need too much demand to pull it up. Keep a close eye on **The Chaos Effect Omega.** This one's got strong potential.



Valiant Logo and Art TM & © 1994 Voyager Communications, Inc.

THE STORY OF CHAOS

Ivar the Timewalker unwittingly opens a time portal from "The End of Time" to the present day Earth. This hole in time does not conveniently close as normally happens on his travels, but stays open, releasing huge amounts of necromantic energy. This energy creates an electrical "freeze" all over Earth, unleashing a global catastrophe and killing millions.

"Energy creates an electrical 'freeze' all over Earth, unleashing a global catastrophe and killing millions."

Each Valiant title will show what happens when each of the Valiant heroes experiences The Chaos Effect. Some heroes attempt to deal with the Earth-threatening problem while others just do their best to survive. Valiant insists that this is "a mega-adventure," not a "crossover."

Vantage finds it interesting that "crossover" has suddenly become a dirty word. Simultaneously, Valiant (with The Chaos Effect), DC (with Zero Hour), and other publishers, are insisting that their big stories don't require readers to read every issue. Every issue can stand alone, these publishers insist. It seems you (the consumer) don't like coercive crossovers, and it seems that you've been heard.

Clearly, this is a reaction to the proliferation of universes — with so many crossovers to choose from people simply can't afford to buy ALL of the books in any one crossover any more. This is significant because it appears that the mega-crossover marketing concept, pioneered by Jim Shooter as part of Marvel's Secret Wars several years ago, is no longer applicable to modern comics. Crossovers must now be mega-adventures, made up of single issues that can stand alone. Those publishers who make the outdated mistake of relying on the old marketing plan may be dooming themselves to failure.

In any case, **Vantage** has acquired the following Chaos Effect information:

- Magnus is "expendable." He is being replaced by Torque, son of Magnus and Leeja. Torque is now the new lead character in Magnus, Robot Fighter.

- Possible tie-in with **Dr. Mirage #5**? In this issue there is a small child who gets saved by Shadowman wh was sent back to 194 Peking China by Mastr Darque. Shadowma says, "After all . . . on small child can't disrup the entire fabric of tim — I hope . . ." Insid sources tell **Vantag** that the little girl ma be Dr. Mirage's mother.

- **Secret Weapons** #11-13, preludes to th Chaos Effect that have been shrouded i secrecy for months, may play an ever more important part than was originall anticipated. This, again, from key source These are the only books that Valiant refus es to answer ANY questions about (Estimated print-run of #11: 65,000)

- The first <u>announced</u> appearance of Th Visitor: **Alpha.** Every month we ask Valian marketing VP Marty Strever where the rea first appearance is. Every month he says, told you, it's a secret. Now could yo please leave my front lawn?" We'll drive him nuts 'til he breaks.

- We do know this much: The Visitor is not o this Earth.

- The final issue of **Archer and Armstrong** (look for back-issue A&A value to drop).

- New powers for Dr. Mirage and Shadowman.

- Geoff the Geomancer "gets nuked" in the fourth week — his "shocking" fate revealed in the last issue of **Archer and Armstrong.**

- Mademoiselle Noir (1st app: **Archer and Armstrong** #9) gets souped-up powers.

- First Valiant work by Jurgens and Ordway.

- Sixteen covers feature the same background motif. (this can get tiresome quickly if not handled carefully. Still, **Vantage** has high hopes.)

- Sets the plate for **Geomancer** #1 (nope, no Geoff here) and leads into **Timewalker** #1 (Ivar, 1st app. A&A #8).

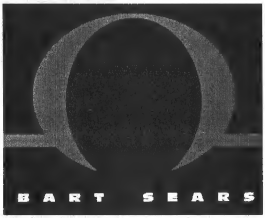
- A national radio campaign and heavy advertising in the comics industry.

- Prominent roles for Valiant's popular Solar the Destroyer and Timewalker.

BART SEARS GETS RATHER OMINOUS

Bart Sears, the guy who became a comic-dom household name with his eye-popping rendition of the cover to **X-O MANOWAR** #14, is starting his own publishing business.

Sears is starting Ominous Press, a new publisher in the tradition of groups like Image, Axis, and Blackball. This move is significant since Sears is widely regarded as being one of the top ten hottest artists in the nation. Sears' current projects include **The Violator** mini-series for Todd McFarlane and the monthly Brutes and Babes column in **Wizard.**



Wisely, Sears is capitalizing on the wide circulation of **Wizard** by calling his company's first book Brute & Babe. **Brute and Babe — "It Begins"** will be the first comic on sale from Ominous, due out in July, and on advance-order forms now.

The **"It Begins"** comic will be in an unusual format that Sears calls the "Monument Set." A monument set is made up of eight cardboard, unbound pages called "Tablets." **"It Begins"** will provide the reader with sixteen pages of story for $4.95.

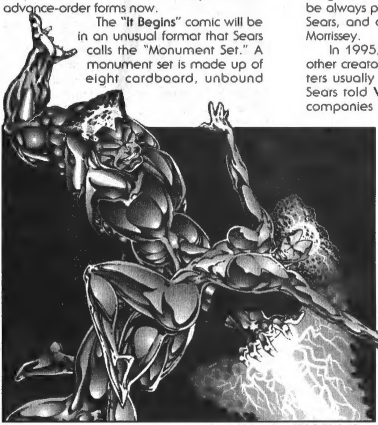
Were Sears not Sears, **Vantage** would label this item as short on pages and long on price...and doomed to failure. However, with the huge media exposure and popularity Sears has enjoyed, it is possible this idea could enjoy considerable success. Keep in mind that Sears has a highly devoted sub-culture of fans — those who have enjoyed learning how to draw by reading Sears' column. **Most advance-orderers are not young, aspiring artists, and may not take this into consideration.**

Ominous will then come out with two more Brute and Babe books — one will be another monument set and the other will be a standard comic. All of this, as well as everything Ominous does up until December, will be always pencilled and sometimes inked by Sears, and co-written by Sears and Michael Morrissey.

In 1995, Ominous will publish comics by other creators, with ownership of the characters usually held exclusively by Sears. Still, Sears told **Vantage**, "Many of the present companies take their creators for granted, draining all of the creative energy from them, until they become disenchanted with comics. I want the opposite for Ominous Press." Already on board is Andy Smith, who's past work can be found in the pages of **Quasar, Silver Surfer,** and Erik Larsen's **Deadly Duo.**

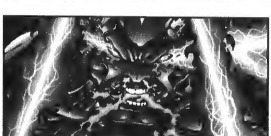
Brute & Babe comics will feature the Brute & Babe characters that Sears uses to teach his craft to aspiring artists each month in **Wizard.** There are no current plans to use any characters that have already been introduced in comics. Ominous will be a self-contained Universe with titles that interact and intersect with one another.

continued...



Brute and Babe and Logo TM & © 1994 Bart Sears

BART SEARS (cont'd)



"Our graphics and design will be unparalleled throughout the industry, and we are just starting out."

Sears insists, "One thing I find amusing in comics today is the use of the word 'continuity,' as many companies have very little actual continuity at all. Their worlds lose all believability as their characters' actions don't show any realistic ramifications throughout their own title, much less others."

"For example if all of New York were destroyed in a battle of titans, the aftermath [in our universe] would reflect the dire consequences of the city throughout the nation. People can only be in one place at any given time and Ominous stories will all reflect that. An event that affects everyone in the Ominous universe will affect everyone, regardless of consequences."

Sears has strong heartfelt views on the sort of "relentlessly powerful comics" he wants to produce. He said, "When I buy a **Pheros** comic (scheduled for future release), I want to read a story about Pheros, not his girlfriend. I want to tell stories of heroic adventure."

Sears is clearly excited. "I normally get into the office between 6:00 a.m. and 8:00 a.m. I hit the drawing board, while also overseeing what is being done throughout the day. I work through the day until at least 10:00 p.m., often times much later." Sears added, "The stuff we are doing is wildly different. Our graphics and design will be unparalleled throughout the industry, and we are just starting out."

VALIANT TO BE SOLD FOR $65 MILLION

Valiant is to be sold for about $65 million in cash and stock to Acclaim Entertainment, Inc., a Long Island entertainment software company.

The current owners are Publisher Steve Massarsky, Editor in Chief Bob Layton, Vice President John Hartz, and the Triumph Capital investement group. They have agreed to sell Voyager Communications, the parent company of Valiant, to this major player in the video game market. A Valiant spokesman insists that "continued employment" for the owners is part of the contract and that from an outsider's perspective, everything at Valiant will be business as usual.

Acclaim produces video games for Nintendo and Sega home entertainment systems. The company also creates arcade games. Acclaim is probably best-known to the general public for bringing Mortal Kombat from the arcades into homes across America.

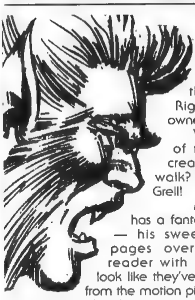
Vantage sources indicate that several companies had shown an interest purchasing Voyager, including Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc. The owners of Voyager, however, were inclined "to find a buyer who could help bring Voyager into new markets," said Valiant spokesman James Perham. "This also creates more opportunity for movies and TV," he added.

Perham denied any connection between a soft comics market and the sale of Voyager. "We've been talking about this for quite some time," he said.

A letter of intent to buy Voyager has been signed by all of the parties involved for a mix of stock and cash that has yet to be determined. The Federal Trade Commission is expected to approve the sale, which is scheduled to take place in July.

Vantage will keep a close eye on Acclaim and Valiant. If Acclaim attempts to micro-manage Valiant, without an appreciation for the importance of the story, art, continuity, the back-issue marketplace, on-time shipping, or other factors, the results could be disastrous. On the other hand, if **X-O Manowar** or **Ninjak** were to become the next Mortal Kombat, this could only bode well for Valiant and for their back-issues.

MIKE GRELL'S CREATIVE FIRE



Okay, what have we been saying is the wave of the future? Right! Creator-owned!

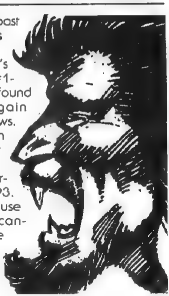
Who is one of the coolest creators ever to walk? Right! Mike Grell!

Mike Grell has a fantastic art-style — his sweeping, vast pages overpower the reader with scenes that look like they've been taken from the motion picture **Dances With Wolves.** Still, his writing is even better. Grell develops his characters into complex people with hearts and vices. He tells a tale befitting any good campfire, one that keeps those pages turning.

Years ago he created cult classics with titles like **Warlord** and **Starslayer** — bigger-than-life science-fiction and fantasy epics that attracted the attention of thousands of new readers as well as the marketplace.

More recently, Grell has concentrated his time on Green Arrow, a more down-to-earth character who has inspired thousands. Stories focused on drugs, ecology, personal relationships, and organized crime — great reading, but not the sort of stuff that attracts the market.

Still, **Vantage** challenges you to find the 1988 **Green Arrow** #1, scripted by Grell, in any 50¢ box. Grell number ones always go for well above cover — with one exception. Having finally left **Green Arrow** in 1992, Grell turned his attention to a new comic project over this past year, **Shaman's Tears.**



Oddly, Grell's **Shaman's Tears** #1-2 can today be found in those bargain boxes or the shows. Why? Well, in part, because it was somewhat over-printed during the glut of '93. Why else? Because the book was canceled by Image Comics.

Without new issues of **Shaman's Tears** coming out from Image, readers lost interest and the book fell in value. After months of negotiations Grell has made arrangements for his **Shaman's Tears** to be printed by another publisher, Image's newest creator-owned competitor, Axis Comics.

Shaman's Tears #1-2 contain many of the elements of Grell's past successes — majestic panels, a science-fiction slant, a human message, and great characterization. Look for **Shaman's Tears** to become another cult favorite, and look for #1-2 to leave the bargain boxes.

While not another **X-Men, Shaman's Tears** #1-2 from Image and the new #3-up from Axis, could have a very bright future in the market.

Whether you're a dealer, reader, or both, **Vantage** suggests you take a peek in those bargain boxes for #1-2 and be sure to grab #3-up when they come out. **Shaman's Tears** shows great promise.

Shaman's Tears Artwork TM & © 1994 Mike Grell

So You Like To Search?

For you show-hunters out there, there's also a rare **Shaman's Tears** #3 ashcan floating around. Grell printed it in a small quantity to give readers access to it right after Image canceled the book. It is the true first printing of the complete **Shaman's Tears** #3, and for the time being it's not too expensive at the shows — especially if you can find a dealer who doesn't know **Shaman's Tears** is coming back!

WELCOME! WELCOME! WHY ARE YOU LATE?

Ohhhhhhh...well will you look at this! Look at how all of the other comic-related magazines are starting to talk about Zero Hour! Welcome, welcome to all! **Vantage** has only been bearing this thing to death for about six months now, telling you that Zero Hour would be the biggest thing since Nintendo.

Zero Hour Logo and Artwork TM & © 1994 DC Comics

We're flattered that our giant, lumbering competitors are starting to see the light, but we're afraid they're still slow and dim. While they're talking about what Zero Hour IS for the first time, **Vantage** has been working hard on our Zero Hour checklist and on the important details...and oh boy is Zero Hour starting to look good!

As you know, with Zero Hour approaching, the DC timestream is getting steadily worse. Temporal distortions and paradoxes are increasing, and nowhere is the chaos more powerfully felt than in the 30th century, where Valor, the Legion of Super-Heroes, and the Legionnaires must face the "End of an Era."

End of an Era is a six-part crossover that runs through **Valor, Legionnaires,** and **Legion of Super-Heroes.** Follow this. Zero Hour will be big. The prelude to Zero Hour will be the under-printed End of an Era, picks for this month. The [illegible] to End of an Era is **Valor #12-up,** books which are so under-printed that we could just scream! **In this post-glut time of cautious comic-ordering, recent Valors such as #19-20 have dipped down to print-runs of below 40,000 each! Recent Legion books are equally low!** Hence, Top Pick of the Month status for **Valor** (again!), and pick status for the Legion books.

In End of an Era, the ongoing power struggle between Mordru, Glorith, and the Time Trapper reaches a high point, as their individual attempts to reshape reality threaten to unravel the 30th century. Eventually Mordru, Glorith, and the Time Trapper join forces, as "the whirlwind of chaos that sweeps through the continuum draws that century's greatest heroes into its vortex," says DC.

"**End of an era is the intersection point of plot threads that have been building for years,**" explained DC editor KC Carlson. "This is the payoff for Legion fans who've waited for answers to a lot of burning questions. This story answers them all, including the real rela-

Team Titan Artwork TM & © 1994 DC Comics

tionship between the Legion of Super-Heroes and the Legionnaires, as well as the Legionnaires' true origins."

After End of an Era, the entire DC universe will become involved. The Zero Hour five-issue miniseries will come out in June, counting down from #4, to #3, etc., to #0. **Vantage expects this numbering gimmick to be a hit.** Even more exciting is DC's plan to have almost every DC title in August released as a #0 issue. Wow! Look for huge fan-mania over those rack-filled #0s! (Hey, we're not stupid...look for a VPRR #0 covering Zero Hour as well!) These #0 issues will tie in to the conclusion of Zero Hour and they will act as jumping on points for new readers.

Sources indicate that the Zero Hour event will add something special and new to each DC title. We're talking a new character, a new mission, a new direction, or a new costume for just about every title!

DC will also use Zero Hour to introduce a new version of the Golden Age Starman in his own title. Starman's old nemesis, the Mist, will look to this new Starman as an opportunity for revenge. Expect Golden Age Starman fans to be reminded of their nostalgic feelings towards Starman. Watch for increased interest in Golden Age Starman. (1st app: **Adventure Comics** #61, 1st Mist app: **Adventure Comics** #67)

...and of course, keep an eye out for those **Valor** books at the shows. The rest of the world will catch on soon. The party's almost over, but it was good while it lasted, eh?

Support Your Local Comic Shop!

- **The best selection!**

- **See what you buy before you buy it!**
- **Friendly, personalized service!**

The local comic shop is your personal connection to the world of comics! It needs YOUR support to keep bringing you truly awesome entertainment! Shop there often! Tell 'em Vantage sent you!

VANTAGE

WANTED:

GOLDEN AND/OR SILVER AGE

WRITERS!

If you'd like to write a short monthly article about the market for Golden and/or Silver Age books please call or write. Serious inquiries only.

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IS THE TIME RIGHT?

"The time is right for the leader in comic book publishing to be the leader in comic book sales," proclaims a DC Comics statement.

They may be right. DC's market-share is consistently second to Marvel's, but dealers and consumers generally agree that DC is the winner in the contest for readability and quality.

DC has formulated a six-month battle-plan that is far more detailed and impressive than any other comic publisher's similar presentation. Vantage has obtained a copy and, with an eye towards the market, we have questioned DC on different aspects of it. Here's what we dug up . . .

Judge Dredd © 1994 DC Comics and Fleetway Editions, Ltd.
Judge Dredd is a trademark of Fleetway Editions Ltd.

Judge Dredd: Justice in Anarchy

Judge Dredd is an incredibly popular cult favorite over in the United Kingdom. Dredd now comes to American DC Comics in a brand-new ongoing series.

Judge Dredd #1 begins in 2045 A.D. when, with crime running rampant, the Department of Justice is renamed the Department of Judgment by Presidential Order. The Chief Judge is appointed to preside over a select group of judges who will administer justice in Mega-City One, where anarchy reigns supreme.

Of all the Judges selected, Dredd is the most unflinching and mysterious. **Judge Dredd** #1 is due out in June.

Advance-orderers may go cautious on this one due to the performance of Marvel UK, which many dealers were disappointed with. However, Judge Dredd is an interesting concept that has always done well in Europe, and he will be presented to readers as an American phenomenon. Also, keep in mind the impending 1995 Judge Dredd movie where Dredd is played by Stallone (but also keep in mind that only a handful of the movies supposedly coming out ever really do come out).

Vertigo Expansion

DC's plans are cluttered with a variety of new Vertigo graphic novels and limited series, but they have planned to start only two new ongoing series in the next several months — a wise move.

Vertigo has captured the critical adult end of the market, an important niche that is sure to grow with time. The current ongoing Vertigo titles are **Animal Man, Black Orchid, The Books of Magic, Doom Patrol, Hellblazer, Sandman Mystery Theatre, Shade The Changing Man,** and **Swamp Thing.**

DC COMICS

The new titles added will be Preacher (Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon) and The Invisibles (Grant Morrison). **Vantage** has a keen eye on The Invisibles — Grant Morrison has a history of strong writing, and his stint on Animal Man gathered considerable market attention.

DC is even promoting The Invisibles as, "A story that will cultivate the same intense following as **The Sandman.**"

They could easily be right. Look for speculators to pass this one up for heroes in tights, keeping the print run low.

The Invisibles will be "Morrison's strangest characters to date," says DC. "All that's required to be a member [of the Invisibles] is to be involved in a sustained activity against all forces which retard human development and evolution," says Morrison. One could also keep an eye open for the Invisibles' symbol, a blank white badge, in keeping with their elusive nature.

The Invisibles #1 is on this month's advance-order form.

Star Trek Crossover

The Malibu crossover we announced last issue has been revealed to be a Star Trek crossover with DC! DC and Malibu join forces to create Star Trek: The **Next Generation/Star Trek Deep Space Nine,** a four-issues mini-series that brings two of the universe's most famous starship crews together.

A threat to the wormholes brings the Enterprise to Deep Space Nine where Riker, Dax, and Kira team-up to enter the worm hole. But Riker and Kira have fought on opposite sides in the past. Can they work together now?

Coming soon.

Batman/Punisher: Lake of Fire

DC and Marvel team up to present the story of two heroes who had to meet. This will be the first meeting of the Batman and the Punisher.

Still, which Batman does the Punisher meet? Jean Paul Valley, the former Azrael, according to our sources.

DC and Marvel each put out a separate meeting of the two heroes.

Watch for heavy advance-ordering on this major event. As for market reaction, it's

Batman TM & © 1994 DC Comics Punisher TM & © 1994 Marvel Ent. Group

a coin toss, but for reading, Vantage is sure we'll all be blown away.

Emerald Events

Hal Jordan continues on his obsessive quest for power, as new Green Lantern Kyle Rayner acquaints himself with the ring. As part of the Zero Hour unraveling of time, Kyle confronts original Green Lantern Alan Scott. This leads to the ultimate confrontation about who is the one and ONLY Green Lantern.

Green Lantern TM & © 1994 DC Comics

Zero Hour Tidbits

Inside sources indicate that Zero Hour will have a profound effect on the continuity of Hawkman. Furthermore, our sources indicate that Zero Hour will actually TIE IN with the old **Crisis on Infinite Earths** miniseries. **Crisis** is essentially the rewritten origin of the DC universe. We made it a pick last issue in light of the new attention that is sure to be focused on the DC universe in general. **Our new information that Zero Hour actually ties in with Crisis makes this pick even more exciting!**

Sovereign Seven

This title will feature the return of Chris Claremont to monthly comics. Due out in late 1994, Sovereign even appears to incorporate many of the elements of Claremont's record-breaking run on the X-Men, including the sense of alienation that comic fans seem to enjoy reading about.

"This is a book about immigrants," says Claremont, "about strangers in a strange land. More important, it's a book about seven people who have no one to depend upon other than one another."

The **Sovereign Seven** are the last survivors of an inter-dimensional incident that decimated almost all levels of existence. When their alternate universes were overwhelmed by a terrifying threat, fate cast them together and thrust them into our reality. As the story unfolds, it becomes clear their meeting is no coincidence. Each was a person of power in his own world, an heir to a ruling family with status, wealth, and power.

Now, all of that is lost.

The team's seven members are: Cascade, who can move across space and time; Network, a telepath; Reflex, a telekinetic flyer; Rampart, a gentle man of great power; Finale, whose great beauty is her weapon; Indigo, a master of disguise with no civilian identity; and Cruiser, a pure unstoppable force, clobbering-type guy.

Claremont opens the story at a cappuccino bar "at the end of universe" straddling the borders of New York, Massachusetts, and Vermont.

Vantage is amazed at how convoluted and developed the plot is already, and the first issue isn't even out yet. Obviously Claremont's up to his old tricks. It hurts your brain, but hey, it sells.

Sovereign Seven will be fully integrated into the DC universe.

Sovereign Seven TM & © 1994 DC Comics

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VANTAGE PRESS RELEASE REVIEW
Inside information for comic dealers and collectors!

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VANTAGE QUICKIES

The Huntsman TM & © 1994 Chris Claremont WildC.A.T.S. TM & © 1994 Jim Lee

Claremont's Huntsman

Claremont's stint on **WildC.A.T.S.** has been extended from #10-12 to #10-13, now all **Vantage** picks. Contrary to published reports elsewhere, Image insists that as **Vantage** goes to press there is no firm deal for Image to print a **Huntsman** comic. **Sources however indicate that Claremont is "really attached" this character** and we can probably expect the Huntsman to resurface soon after his WildC.A.T.S. introduction. A nice set of picks. The **Vantage** estimated print-run for WildC.A.T.S. #10: 200,000.

Malibu Unloads Genesis, Picks up Ultraforce

Malibu is shutting down their **Genesis** line, apparently to concentrate on their better-selling products. Those of you who have back-issues might be wise to unload them now.

Ultraforce will be the new Ultraverse team book from Malibu, the artwork by George Perez.

Wetworks Is Coming

After a two year delay, **Wetworks** from renowned artist Whilce Portacio is being re-offered from Image Comics. **Vantage** has learned from inside sources at Image that a formal announcement will be made regarding Whilce Portacio's return to comics shortly.

After making a real name for himself on Marvel's X-titles, Whilce Portacio solicited issues of Wetworks back in Image's early days. However, Portacio failed to deliver any issues to stores. He is resolicitng **Wetworks** #1 for a July release.

Our sources further indicate that **Wetworks** #1 is completely pencilled and inked, and #2 is fully pencilled and half-inked as **Vantage** goes to press.

Liefeld Prints New Artwork

In a surprise move, Liefeld has taken out last-minute advertisements in the advance-order catalogs show-casing his new art-style. The artwork is similar to his old work, but with more depth, and with less reliance on the many finely drawn lines Rob Liefeld is known for. Liefeld returns to comics with Team Youngblood #9 and then Youngblood #6.

Youngblood Artwork TM & © 1994, Rob Liefeld

☆OFFICIAL☆ Ominous Press PRESS RELEASE

Reprinted below is an official press release exactly as it was mailed to Vantage. Since press releases come straight from comic publishers, they can be the most accurate, most up-to-date source of news possible. They can also be biased.

Ominous Press Release

BART SEARS FORMS OMINOUS PRESS

Bart Sears enters the world of self-publishing with Ominous Press. Sears, best known for his dynamic penciling and storytelling abilities, has worked with every major publisher in the industry for the last ten years. Now he will be introducing readers to a new world of comics that promises the most comprehensive and reader-friendly continuity yet.

Building upon the essentials of graphic storytelling, Ominous Press will deliver heroic stories of adventure on a grand scale. Using cinema-graphic techniques, and state-of-the-art computer color, Ominous Press will be the leader in the industry.

These projects will carve the cornerstone of the universe you will want to be a part of.

Brace yourself for relentlessly powerful comic adventure from Ominous Press

July will feature the release of the first Ominous Press Project:

- **BRUTE & BABE - *"... IT BEGINS..."***
  Monument Set I - *8 Tablets (16 Powerful Pages)*
  8 Page Brute & Babe *"...It Begins..."*
  8 Page Ominous Press Preview
  Full Color - No Ads

Slated for August release :

- **BRUTE & BABE - *MAEL'S RAGE***
  Brute's Fury Knows No Bounds...
  32 Page Premium Comic Format
  (Including 7 Page Pheros *"If this be Despair"*)
  Full Color

- **BRUTE & BABE - *THE DEATH OF PHEROS***
  Monument Set II - *16 Tablets (17 Page Story)*
  Tablet Backs Form the Largest Splash in Comic History
  Full Color - No Ads

"THE TRUTH BEHIND THE LEGEND"

VANTAGE Voicebox

Ominous Press Cards: First Pheros!

Three Ominous Press characters have already appeared as individual trading cards in the Creator's Universe Card Set. Vantage has learned that one of these heroes is Pheros, who will get his own Ominous title shortly.

Sources close to Ominous indicate that Pheros will be the most powerful hero in the Ominous Universe. He leads the fight against darkness. Evil trembles before the coming of Pheros.

Ominous Press

A Division of Sears Studio, Inc.

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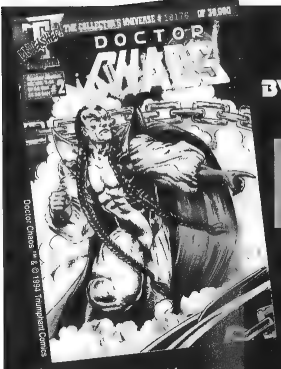

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1) You must use the coupon provided– no copies;

2) If we receive over 200 orders we will return checks at random (sorry, we have no choice)!

Offer expires July 15, 1994.

About Triumphant and *Doctor Chaos #2*

Triumphant is the new, young science-fiction universe. In addition to its status as one of the key early books in the Triumphant universe, *Doctor Chaos #2* features the first appearance of Defiant's War Dancer. Signed books are hard to find, and multiple signings on the same book are even more special. *Vantage* has orchestrated a unique arrangement — the four people with the greatest influence over the creation of *Doctor Chaos #2* will sign each copy: Triumphant Publisher Eric Shefferman, Triumphant President Adam Post, Writer John Riley, and Penciler Greg Fox!

☐ Yes, I'd like ***Doctor Chaos #2***, personally signed by Eric Shefferman, Adam Post, John Riley, and Greg Fox, limited to 200, with accompanying certificate of authenticity! I understand that if **Vantage** receives orders for over 200 copies my coupon and money may be selected at random to be returned (I will receive a full refund).

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READ THE RULES. 1) Surprise, surprise, no purchase is necessary. 2) To win, you must send in an entry (coupon) filled out by two people. The top gets filled out by YOU. The bottom gets filled out by the guy sitting behind the counter at your local comic shop. 3) You may send in your entry on another piece of paper, or on a photocopy of the coupon. 4) Send as many ST:DS9 contest entries as you want, but each contestant may send in only one per store. The store does not have to carry **Vantage**. You can mail your entries to us all in the same envelope, so feel free to hit every store in your city. Entries that are not signed by an actual store employee will be disqualified. Entries that are not 100% filled out and complete will be disqualified. Contest ends 7/1/94.

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In **Advance Comics:** Look under **Vantage: Press Release Review,** before **Wizard!**
In **Comics Score Board:** Look under **Vantage,** after Valiant!
In **Future Comics:** Look under **Vantage,** after Valiant!
In **Previews:** Look under **Vantage,** after Valiant!
In **Up N' Coming:** Look under **Vantage,** in the middle of nowhere!

VANTAGE PRESS RELEASE REVIEW #1000

Mail to: VANTAGE ST:DS9 CONTEST, Suite #166, 10238 West National Avenue, West Allis, WI 53227
This entry should be mailed in by the contestant, not the comic store! Good luck!

Congratulations to Joseph Holmes of Union, NJ for winning our **Ninjak Gold** contest! Thanks go out to all of you who entered! Joseph is now the proud owner of a **Ninjak** #1 Gold and the **Vantage** Giant Nothing! Way to go, Joseph!

Congratulations to Charles Ramsdell of Silver Lake, NH, for his answer to our question, who said "Can I cook or can I cook?" (Dr. Carol Marcus from Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan). Charles is now the proud owner of the **Vantage** Giant Nothing. Should be great to hang out with (hint-hint).

One Card at a Time

Get out your check books and credit cards! Fleer has announced the **Flair Marvel Universe** series cards. An early peek at the cards guarantees that every Marvel card collector (which includes nearly every non-sports card collector in the country) will absolutely, positively have to have them.

The high level of quality comes with a heavy sting — the cards start out more expensive than any non-sports cards ever. Suggested retail for these cards is $4 a pack, yielding a cost of $96 for a 24-pack box of cards!

At first blush these cards seem too expensive to have any upward growth potential, but further examination reveals some hope. Many collectors will be unable or unwilling to pay the higher price for these cards, and dealers that have trouble selling the packs at the necessary high prices may panic and sell the cards at a loss (pushing prices down). **Vantage** has a better suggestion for them!

The only thing to compare to this card set is the series one **Marvel Masterpiece** cards, which currently sell for $3 to $5 a pack — nearly the same cost as the **Flair Marvel Universe** packs — but the older set has only six cards per pack compared to the Flair's ten count. This lower cost per card points out the way dealers might most successfully sell this release: as single cards.

Kids who have only a few dollars will be more than happy to pay fifty cents to a dollar for common cards, and a few dollars for some of the cards (Wolverine, Spider-Man, and some of the X-Men cards from the **Masterpiece** set command high prices, and **Vantage** sees the potential for even higher prices for similar cards in the Flair set). Dealers may have problems selling sets of cards for $35-$75, but selling cards one at a time could easily yield over $100 per set.

This lower cost per card points out the way dealers might most successfully sell this release: as single cards.

Sports cards have been sold in this manner for years, and this set may finally force the non-sports market to follow suit. If it does, single cards will be greedily snapped up, and the resulting mismatch between supply and demand could push prices for sealed boxes to many multiples of their original cost.

No information is available yet on the chase cards, but based on the first few sets of cards that Fleer has done with the Marvel

characters, **Vantage** expects they could easily out-price the battle cards from the original series one **Marvel Masterpiece** set. Stockpiling these chase cards early, as well as single cards of the more popular characters when prices are still low, may prove to be even more profitable than buying and holding boxes of cards. Collectors may be well advised to find the dealers who do not read **Vantage** and who do not adopt these strategies as they will be the ones more likely to panic and try to move the cards quickly.

Instant Replay

One of the bright spots in the non-sports card market in the last year was Comic Image's **All-Chromium Conan** set. This was not lost on CI, and they have lost no time releasing the **All-Chromium Conan II** card set. Like its predecessor, this set features 90 cards that are finished with special chromium details, giving the cards a nice 3-D look. Once again there are prism chase cards, but this time CI has added an additional three-card subset and a rare medallion card. Part of the reason for the success that the first card set enjoyed was the

Conan ™ & © 1994 Conan Properties, Inc.

WILD C.A.T.S. ™ & © 1994 Jim Lee and Brandon Choi

surprise "Holofoil" chase cards and the ten cards with alternate backgrounds. While there is no announcement about similar antics in the second set, most collectors had no idea that these special chase sets existed — they simply liked the artwork.

Although there is some concern that the best artwork might have been used up on the first set, there is so much high-quality Conan artwork from the last twenty years that CI should have little trouble producing another high-quality set. Because of the appeal of these cards to both comic readers and art collectors, and the likelihood that orders will be lighter than normal due to the high-cost Flair cards coming out at the same time, **Vantage** foresees a potentially bright future for this set.

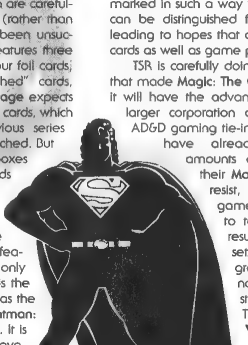
All Chromium, All the Time

Numerous chromium cards featuring Image characters have been appearing in magazines for years, and now Image fans have an all-chromium set to call their own: Wildstorm Productions is releasing the **Wildstorm Chromium Series 1** cards. Jim Lee and Marc Silvestri are the driving forces behind this set, but numerous other top notch artists are involved (particularly Travis Charest and

Brian Stelfreeze). **WildC.A.T.S.** and **Gen 13** are two of the hottest Image comics, and they are joined on these cards by characters from **Kindred**, **Stormwatch**, and **Union**. **Vantage** couldn't help but notice that dealers underestimated the demand for the **Maxx** cards, and if they repeat their mistake, these cards could be a rough find for collectors.

Pictures At A Master(ful) Exhibition

SkyBox has tried hard to follow-up its success with the **Doomsday** cards, but so far none of the other DC card sets has found a market. Its best chance to date appears to be the upcoming **DC Master Series** cards. This set is made up of 90 cards which are carefully reproduced from painted art (rather than the comic book art which has been unsuccessful in two prior sets), and features three different kinds of chase cards: four foil cards; five double-sided "spectra-etched" cards, and one 3-D SkyDisc card. **Vantage** expects high demand for the five spectra cards, which have proven popular in previous series even when only one side was etched. But the rarity of them requires five boxes to make one set of chase cards (which could push the price of those cards while leaving lots and lots of excess sets floating around). The SkyDisc card will be even more sought-after, as it features Superman, and shows up only once in every ten boxes, and is the second in a series (SkyDisc #1 was the Batman chase card in the **Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight** set). It is quite likely that people who have no interest in the regular card sets will start collecting the SkyDiscs (there should be only 20,000 of them), and SkyBox has wisely encouraged this by numbering the SkyDiscs without respect to the card set they come in. The cards face an uphill battle because of the failure of the last two DC sets to find a large market, but the chase cards may save them.



Superman & DC logo ™ & © 1994 DC Comics, Inc.

The SkyDisc card will be even more sought-after, as it features Superman, and shows up only once in every ten boxes...

Late to the Party?

Magic:The Gathering is an overwhelming success — a collectible card set that was necessary to play an amazingly well-balanced game. It was only a matter of time before **Wizards of the Coast** faced some major competition in this field, and it's due to arrive any minute: TSR is releasing **Spellfire**. Both starter sets (which include two decks of cards, allowing players to begin fighting, er, playing immediately) and booster packs will be released in massive quantities, with more booster packs tied-in to the TSR **Ravenloft** and **Dragonlance** properties coming in the following two months. The cards will be marked in such a way that first edition cards can be distinguished from future releases, leading to hopes that collectors will buy the cards as well as game players.

TSR is carefully doing most of the things that made **Magic: The Gathering** so hot, but it will have the advantage of a massively larger corporation and the well-known AD&D gaming tie-ins. Those players who have already spent massive amounts of money acquiring their **Magic** cards will resent, resist, and denounce the game, but it will be hard to tell whether this is a result of an inferior card set/game or simply sour grapes. These cards will no doubt do well in stores that also stock TSR games, but **Vantage** wonders whether TSR isn't too late in this market niche.

Media Cards

Several card sets based on current movies are on their way, and, as usual, the market will respond based less as a result of the card sets than as a reaction to the shows

they are based on. Disney is releasing **The Lion King**, and SkyBox has several sets of cards due out based on the movie. The first set to hit the stores will be a tin with an oversized set of 50 cards. Several weeks later, foil packs which make up a 90-card set (and a separate binder to house them) will appear. The tin set is clearly more attractive.

It's been a radio show, a comic series, and now it will be a feature-length movie and card set: **The Shadow Deluxe Gold Movie Photo Cards** will come out from Topps. There is a 90-card set which contains not only photos, but artwork tying in to the Dark Horse comics. Each pack will contain one of ten gold foil Shadow Legend cards which have been drawn by Jim Steranko (who did those early SHIELD covers that still stand out), and four Topps Finest Shadow chase cards are randomly inserted in the boxes. **Vantage** is impressed by the setup for this release, but who knows what value lurks in these cards? Only the box office receipts know for sure. (If only we could preview the movie as easily as we can get prototypes of the cards!)

All artwork © 1994 Mike Ploog

Speculative Corner

From time to time, one of the card companies tries to take advantage of their sports licenses to boost demand for their non-sports cards. This hasn't had the desired effect yet, but that hasn't stopped Upper Deck from adding a strange wrinkle to the **Valiant Files** card set. Subtitled "Secrets from the Harbinger Corporation," the set itself is rather interesting for Valiant fans, and contains several experiments already. The box the packs come in is actually a plastic tin designed to hold the cards, and a set of folders to put the cards into is also in the box (so everybody has to buy a box to properly collect the set). One card in every pack is part of a 36-card subset of folded, oversize cards. The cards feature information on the Harbingers, the Eggbreakers, and Harada, and several chase card sets are included. And four sets of the cards feature sports figures (such as Michael Jordan), writing them up as super-powered figures in the Valiant Universe. Clearly there is some hope that sports collectors will be attracted to the set, but it seems more likely that the sports figure appearances will simply serve to amuse the sports-minded people who are Valiant fans. Cute experiment — **Vantage** will be taking notes in our lab book, but we don't expect we'll start hoarding Valiant sports cards.

Quick Notes

The Conan cards aren't the only sequel from Comic Images this month. **Jim Warren 2: More Beyond Bizarre** cards offer more surrealistic cards that are geared at a mature audience. The first set stands out in a crowded field, and they sell well if you leave several open packs of cards sitting in the box for people to examine. As attractive as they are to some, they are simply too much for far too many people.

The Fantastic Art of Mike Ploog cards from FPG don't feature his Marvel monster artwork (he is perhaps best known for his work on Werewolf By Night and Ghost Rider), but 90 all-new pieces of art that is in that vein. The sample cards make it clear that this was an excellent decision on someone's part, as the cards are much more striking than copies of the comic art pages. Ironically,

some pages of original art are being given away in the card packs, and stacks of autographed cards and five Metallic Storm cards round out the contents.

Who would have thought that a card set could be based on a video game? Ultra violence at its peak is offered by the **Mortal Combat** game, and we can only wonder what Classic will produce in the cards. One development of note: the card packs available to comic stores will have an exclusive ten-card insert set, so be careful where you buy your cards!

Anime collectors will be delighted to find the **Dragon Ball Z** cards, which are based on a Japanese animated TV series. While the packs are expensive ($3-$4 each), they each contain 9 cards, a sticker, and a prismatic hologram card.

If you're saving cards to hand down to your grandchildren, you might want to pick up a **Ren & Stimpy: Space Madness Keepsake Collection**. This set of oversized cards from Comic Images is limited to 5,000 sets, and will certainly not be in long supply if people in the twenty-first century still remember the ill-mannered dog and cat.

PUBLISHERS: HELP US TO HELP YOU!

Vantage can be an invaluable resource to publishers in three great ways...

1. Your press releases can be published in **Vantage: Press Release Review** at no charge.

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OFFICIAL PRESS RELEASE

Creative Fire Studios

Reprinted below is an official press release exactly as it was mailed to Vantage. Since press releases come straight from comic publishers, they can be the most accurate, most up-to-date source of news possible. They can also be biased.

CREATIVE FIRE STUDIO, INC.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
THREE GRELL SERIES TO AXIS COMICS

Three monthly comic book series created and written by Mike Grell will be published by Axis Comics, starting with the June, 1994 release of ***Shaman's Tears*** #3, Creative Fire Studios announced today.

"***Shaman's Tears*** will continue to be written and drawn by Grell," Creative Fire Studio's editor Mike Gold stated, "and the creative team will be remain intact: Brian Snoddy will be assisting Mike on the art, Steve Haynie will be lettering, and Julia Lacquement will be the color artist. Rick Hoberg will be penciling the second series, ***Bar Sinister***, which is a spin-off from ***Shaman's Tears***." Previously, Mike, Rick, Steve, Julia and Mike worked together on DC's critically acclaimed Green Arrow series. Since leaving Green Arrow, Hoberg has been the penciled of The Strangers for Malibu/Ultraverse. Rick's previous credits have run the gamut from Tarzan to Roger Rabbit.

"The third series, tentatively titled ***Sable and The Cat***, is being drawn by Dick Giordano," Gold continued. This series will mark the return of Jon Sable, Freelance, who starred in his own First Comics series written and drawn by Grell in the 1980s. Sable also enjoyed a brief run as a prime-time network television series. "Sable will be teaming-up, more or less, with his friendly rival Maggie The Cat, the wealthy and beautiful cat burglar who frequented the original Jon Sable series. She usually stole the show, along with the diamonds."

Artist Dick Giordano previously had been executive editor at DC Comics, and is regarded as one of the legendary comics artists. Best known for his work on Batman and Green Lantern, Dick was the inker on Grell's Green Arrow run in the late 1980s. "It's really exciting to be working with Dick again, who has been one of my primary mentors," Grell noted.

"Indeed, this entire operation is something like old home week. The entire creative team has worked together on Jon Sable, Freelance and / or on Green Arrow these past twelve years, and its really great to get everybody back together." Gold disclosed.

"In fact, our working with Axis Comics is an extension of this family environment. Co-founder and ***Tribe*** artist Larry Stroman did his first professional comics work for First Comics when I was editor over there; Mike and I both have been big fans of his ever since. And, of course, our tenure at Image Comics ran parallel." Other previous collaborators,

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Grell continued next page...

OFFICIAL PRESS RELEASE

Creative Fire Studios

Reprinted below is an official press release exactly as it was mailed to Vantage. Since press releases come straight from comic publishers, they can be the most accurate, most up-to-date source of news possible. They can also be biased.

including Shea Anton Pensa and Steve Haynie, have made commitments to projects over at Axis.

"*Shaman's Tears* will resume with the very same issue that had been prepared and ready to go when we were canceled last Labor Day," Grell stated. That issue appeared in an ashcan edition the end of that month. "When *Shaman's Tears* was canceled, I'm proud to say it was one of the best-selling comics on the charts. I'm grateful to the readers who have inundated our office with mail and who voted for me in the Wizard poll. I've been awaiting this day with bated breath."

Grell and Gold selected Axis Comics after receiving offers from a half-dozen publishers and entering into negotiations with three of them. "Quite frankly, Axis made us the best and most business-wise offer, both financially and from a timing perspective," Gold noted. "We all share the same concerns and have shared the same sort of experiences with other publishers in the past. There's a commonalty of purpose between Creative Fire Studio and Axis Comics that is extraordinarily strong.

"When our relationship over at Image started to deteriorate, a number of the Image owners who had long been our friends advised us to stick to our guns and take the best offer we could get. Best offer means a lot of things: the financial perspective is important, but the attitude and management of the publishing company is equally important. We weren't anxious to launch our books while the comics field went through its market correction this winter and spring, but we wanted to be out for summer. Axis was there with the terms, the attitude, the strength and the timing — in all respects, it was the best offer," Gold concluded.

Bar Sinister will be launched shortly after their first story arc concludes in *Shaman's Tears* #4. Jon Sable will be making his comeback appearance in the following issue; the *Sable and the Cat* series will be kicking off late this fall.

Shaman's Tears, Bar Sinister, Jon Sable Freelance, Maggie the Cat, and Sable and the Cat are trademarks of Mike Grell.

VANTAGE™ Voicebox

Why Grell Left Image!

"Poor Mike Gold was reluctant to talk about Mike Grell's departure from Image, insisting that it was "water under the bridge," but Vantage managed to drag it out of him:

Gold said that at Image "our stuff was pushed further and further back" so that the owners of Image Comics could have their books published as early as possible instead. Gold said that he was "ready to FedEx Shaman's Tears #3 to Image one day late," and that it was only late because Grell's interest "was involved in a flood." Soon after, Image canceled Shaman's Tears.

Still, Gold has "a lot of respect for Image," stating that with new management and a new attitude, "Image has been put in a much, much better position."

Gold and Grell finally decided to go with Axis because "they take a very realistic look at what the marketplace is now today."

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COMICS ARE FOR READING FIRST

He was an original awash in a sea of limitations. He was a creative light that remains undiminished by time.

When comic books were disdained as a passing fad for children, writer, artist, editor, and publisher Harvey Kurtzman saw their potential as a new art form. This belief even during comics' infancy led him to develop new story-telling techniques, new color and printing processes, and new respect for comic books.

The creation of **Mad Magazine** with its parody and satire was Kurtzman's masterpiece. Every word and image of the first twenty-eight issues was written, drawn, or initially sketched by him. These issues laid the foundation for **Mad**'s four decades of success, and profoundly influenced hundreds of artists, writers, editors, and film directors.

During his amazing career, Kurtzman's work indirectly influenced the anti-war movement of the '60's, and inspired the creation of Underground Comix. These independently published comics sparked the birth of the alternative comics publishers of today and the development of comic book shops.

His satiric style also inspired movies like Airplane, The Naked Gun, Time Bandits, Young Frankenstien, and Brazil.

Pulitzer Prize winning cartoonist Art Spiegelman, best describes Kurtzman's approach. "You say something true, but high-minded — preferably a couple of things true, but high-minded — to set the rhythm. Then you deflate the whole lofty mess by saying something really true, but base and down to earth. You point out that the Emperor is Nekkid, and that mortals are driven by greed and lust."

These titles represent some of Kurtzman's best work: **Mad**, the first 28 issues (EC Comics, rare); Ballantine paperback collections (rare); reprinted versions in later **Mad Specials**; hardcover reprints by Russ Cochran. **The Jungle Book** (Ballantine Pocket Books, rare); reprints by Kitchen Sink Press. Goodman Beaver (**Help Magazine** issues, rare); reprinted by Kitchen Sink Press. **Little Annie Fanny** (Playboy Press, rare).

Published over many years, these may be difficult to locate. Comic book shops, mail order companies, trade journals, and comics conventions are the best sources. Prices vary widely. Shop around.

TOP READING PICK OF THE MONTH: ELSEWORLDS

"Elseworlds" is one of the neatest ongoing concepts in comics. Every once in a while, DC Comics will place one of their heroes in an "Elseworlds" story where familiar characters exist under unfamiliar conditions.

DC describes Elseworlds best: "In Elseworlds, heroes are taken from their usual settings and put into strange times and places — some that have existed, or might have existed, and others that can't, couldn't or shouldn't exist."

"Elseworlds stories... are often some of the best fiction in comics."

Elseworlds stories, and their silver age precursors, the DC "imaginary stories," are often some of the best fiction in comics. For example, out on the stands now is one heck of a Superman/Batman Elseworlds story in **Superman: Man of Steel Annual** #3.

In this tall tale, Kryptonians have taken over Earth so as to escape the destruction of their homeworld. Their oppression moves the Batman to fight for freedom, even as it eats away at young Kal-El's conscience. Will Kal-El turn against his own people?

Call them Elseworlds, Imaginary Stories, or Lucky Charms. Whatever you call them, these stories are true entertainment. On your local shop's shelves and in the back-issue bins.

*Readers, please send your own picks to **Vantage Viewpoints!** Publishers, please direct review copies to: **Vantage Reading Picks,** 10238 West National Ave, #166, West Allis, WI 53227.*

It's unlikely that you'll get your weekly four-color fix exclusively on a computer screen in the foreseeable future, but it's becoming more and more likely that the much-touted Information Highway will play a role in your comics buying.

BY JACK CURTIN

Superman and Nightwing ™ & © 1994 DC Comics, Inc.

The Thing and Venom ™&© 1994 Marvel Entertainment Group.

One of the interesting debates out there in the real world in recent years has been the question of how long it will take until most of us receive our daily "newspaper" electronically instead of plopped into the only mud puddle at the end of the driveway. We're not talking about standard TV news programs here (which are in fact where most people now get their news anyway), but a nonsimilar version of your traditional comprehensive news, sports, features etc. The answer seems to be: not long at all.

Here, in our little corner of the spectrum, it therefore seems appropriate to pose a similar query. How long will it be before we'll be receiving our favorite comics in the same fashion? When will a fan be able to flick on the television or computer screen and download the latest issue of *Fiber Optics Man*? The answer: right now.

Okay, we're lugging things a bit, but consider that the first fans anywhere to see the opening four pages of Marvel Comics' new *Ghost Rider 2099* title did so on a computer screen. This was, in the words of editor Evan Skolnick, "the first ever 'electronic' ashcan edition of a comic book." Comics fans know that, in the early days of the industry, an "ashcan" was a limited prototype edition created to allow a publisher to lay legal claim to a comic title. In more recent times, ashcans have been offered to the general public as promotional pieces for new titles, first in relatively limited editions from Image and of late in inexpensive mass printings.

The electronic *Ghost Rider 2099* appeared in the Marvel News Library of the Comics and Animation Forum on the CompuServe Information Service (CIS). It marked Marvel's emergence as a serious player in the world of computer networks, following the lead of Malibu Comics Entertainment, which earlier established its own news library on the CIS Comics Forum and which has recently been using the medium to extol the merits of its forthcoming Ultraverse title, *Warriors*, and its entire creator-owned Bravura line. Much of the Malibu material is in full color, making it even more effective than the Marvel material as a promotional tool.

... The first fans anywhere to see the opening four pages of Marvel Comics' new *Ghost Rider 2099* title did so on a computer screen.

The reasoning behind all this electronic activity was made clear by Skolnick in an introductory message to CIS members who downloaded the ashcan:

"In the future, more and more comic book material will be available on the world's computer networks ... and with the emergence of multimedia and the much-hyped information highway, it's likely that computers will soon assist you in the buying, collecting and maybe even reading of your comic books."

The CIS Comics Forum has long been a hangout for both fans and creators. *Ghost Rider 2099* readers were able to talk directly — I wrote Lou Kurtinski, for example, and many of the writers and artists for the Malibu books are on line as well. In fact, it's probably fair to say that writers and artists from virtually every major publisher in the industry have popped in and out of the Forum on one occasion or another.

"I'm admittedly prejudiced," says Forum Sysop (systems operator) Doug Pratt, "but I think we've established one of the great meeting places for comics fans ever. You can in here, electronically speaking, and get to exchange views with all sorts of people from around the world who have many of the same interests. And sometimes—not always, because these folks are busy cre-

Ghost Rider 2099 ™ & © 1994 Marvel Entertainment Group

ating the things we talk about, but sometimes—you look up and the guy sitting across the table from you is one of your favorite writers or artists."

The CIS Forum is not the only electronic gathering place for comics fans and creators. Both America On Line (AOL) and the GENIE network have active comics forums, and the whole new Internet community is peppered with comics-oriented conferences and groups. In fact, Bill Hayes, who runs the Comics List Weekly (COMICS-L), one of the most popular Internet offerings, recently told subscribers of his own interest in "electronic frontiers."

I will be talking in detail about electronic comic books and new ways to interact with sequential art. Hayes promised in March, "I am writing more than I am thereby laying claim to the title 'Comics Mosaic' to work on a World Wide Web server (distribution system). I am very excited about the chance to offer a wide-ranging (pun intended) Internet-based electronic journal featuring typeset quality, text, graphics, and multimedia resources. It will... have the look and feel of published material. All of this will happen at once, but it will happen."

Actually, the computerized self-publication of graphic novels and comic strips has been going on for some time now. In the Computer Art Forum on CIS and the PC Graphics Forum on AOL, New York graphic designer Brian Bednarek, a veteran of both, is listed in the Hall of Fame on CIS as the originator of the first on-screen comic uploaded there. His six-panel story of the rescue of a naked woman from a would-be rapist by a less-than-tidy hero called "Scum" is "pretty crude by my current standards, but does have the distinction of being first," says Bednarek. "At one time I dreamed of becoming a big comic book artist, but making a living got in the way. For the past two years, for my own amusement, I've been creating GIFstrips and uploading them." GIF is short for "graphics interface format," the most popular graphics format because it can be accessed by both the DOS and Macintosh platforms.

Another prolific veteran of computerized story telling, with work in several CIS forums, is San Francisco's Carl Blessing, who has such graphic novels as *Kiar, Dr. Quiet, Medicine Woman,* and *Dabble On* available for downloaders. "I'm 56 years old and have been making pictures for a long time, almost exclusively on the computer for the past three years or so."

When will a fan be able to flick on the television or computer screen and download the latest issue of *Fiber Optics Man*? The answer: right now.

Blessing says. "I've been trying to find the right software that would allow me to make a comic book, or graphic novel, as an entire package. If I find what I'm looking for, I'll probably work on something a bit more detailed and serious that what I have been."

A third veteran of the computer art venues is Wisconsin artist Kevin Clark, who created his Cheshire Cat on the computer and began uploading pages to both CIS and AOL. Not only did he receive useful advice from fellow Forum members about how he might improve the work, but, in what may well be a harbinger of things to come, he actually found a publisher. Buffalo, NY artist Bill Irvine, whose Visionary Media Inc. produces interactive children's picture books and young adult graphic novels in a multi-media format, was struck by Clark's work when he saw it on CIS and has since contracted for a six-book Cheshire Cat series.

"The first book should be available this summer," says Clark, "and we are talking about numerous

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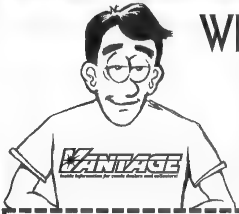
other possible projects as well." Visionary Media is not a comic book publisher per se, points out Irvine. "What we do is a multimedia expansion of the graphic novel genre," he says, "but graphic novels and comics are so closely related that we are operating in the same arena."

Clark's experience may be indicative of the real future of electronic comics publishing, in the opinion of California lawyer Rod Underhill, a fine artist and publisher who has uploaded several examples of his work to the CIS Comics Forum. "Once we have nationwide fiber optics capabilities, so that it will be possible to download graphics files rapidly and inexpensively, I can see a lot of people using the networks to self-publish comic books," he says. "A creator can draw his book, scan the black and white art into his computer and then letter and color it to produce a finished comic book. He can upload that and have it distributed to a potential audience of literally millions of people around the world. That would never be possible if he had to pay a printer thousands of dollars to produce his book and then deal with all the woes of getting it distributed."

The primary purpose of such electronic publishing will be to break into the comics field, to get attention for either the work or the artist, Underhill believes. "I don't think electronic publishing is ever going to replace comic books as we know them today," he says, "because people still want to collect things and the actual books themselves have at least a perceived value. People like that."

However, if comics creators do come to see electronic publishing as a viable alternative in itself, Underhill stresses, there will have to be some provision made to allow those creators to be paid for their efforts. "As things now stand, the network operators and the sysops who own the various forums make money from the number of people

VANTAGE #1000



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who log on and from various uploads and downloads. To the extent that artists help draw those people to the forums, they should be compensated. All those things will have to be worked out if electronic publishing is seen as a commercial venture."

One who agrees is Ernie Colon, the well known and popular comics artist whose graphic novel, *Necro,* is currently in progress on the CIS Comics Forum. "I'm fascinated by computers and started doing this as a lark, just to find out what I could achieve right on the screen," he says. "I don't scan anything in, but do all the work on the computer itself. As I go on, though, I see that there might be something here, some new way to self-publish in an affordable fashion and bypass all the distributors and other folks who can give you such headaches and heartaches. But you'd have to find some way to get paid for it to make the idea work."

Solutions will be developed, promises Pratt. "In some of the graphics forums, where photographers are uploading images which they own, the sysops are counting the number of downloads and using that to determine a payment scale," he says. "That's one way to do it, although that could be unwieldy if you really got into a strong commercial operation. More than likely, the answer will be to build the payment into the download itself, much the way your credit card is charged when you order software via computer."

Acknowledging that "Ernie's allowing us to see this work in progress (*Necro*) has been a terrific gift for all our members," Pratt gleefully points out that the Forum has also rewarded Colon for his participation. As revealed in Malibu's preview of the forthcoming Bravura line, Colon was approached about drawing Jim Starlin's revived *Dreadstar* title, written by Peter David, when "he was tooling around the comic book forum [and] Jim's attorney, Harris Miller, jumped in and asked him if he'd be interested in drawing the new *Dreadstar.*"

All this is clearly uncharted territory, and even a year from now it's likely that an overview of computers and electronic comics publishing will reveal a picture quite unlike the one today—perhaps by then the raging issue will be the now-simmering debate over whether artwork should be scanned into the system or created directly on screen. Wherever things are heading, the evidence so far is that technical advances and economic realities will have a dramatic impact. In fact, they already have.

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*We reserve the right to change info or picks if new information comes in before we print **Vantage**. For changes other than small corrections and minor adjustments, we will keep you updated.

VANTAGE VIEWPOINTS

10238 West National Ave, #166, West Allis, WI 53227

Oh Great Vantage Gods,

First off, I'm writing to praise you for your awesome insight into comic investment picks and for good ol' plain advice on excellent reads.

Secondly, I'd like to address the issue of accuracy, or at least a close facsimile, of pricing guides. I DO understand they're just guides and there WILL be some discrepancies between them. This is to be expected.

Anyway, my main gripe is when there's a huge discrepancy within the same guide. In the same issue of one guide they listed the price of **Bone** #1 as around $50. Then while highlighting hot buy books, they said it was selling for as much as $125.

Now I admit I may be overlooking something here. Perhaps they were saying smart people who use guides will pay no more than $50, and comic-crazed Bone fans will pay a lot more. Do you think? At the time of this writing, the cheapest I could find one was $150. So seriously, what goes on here?

Clare Kierstead
Caribou, ME

*In defense of your price guide we will say this — **Bone** #1 varies widely in price right now and it would be a challenge for any price guide editor to pin it down. We think your guide just made an innocent mistake — they should have listed more consistent numbers. As you say, your guide is just a guide. For the most accurate price guide in the whole world, let your fingers do the walking through the comic bins at your local shop or show — there's no replacement for the real prices that a dealer must charge in the dog-eat-dog marketplace! —VV*

Hi Vantage Viewpoints,

Thanks a lot for your book. I enjoy it very much. I enjoy reading comics and secondly collecting. All the gold and silver edition comics hurt us small collectors. I wish the special editions would all go away. I'm mostly a Marvel/Image person. Great comic reading: any storylines from McFarlane and Frank Miller. Liefeld and Platt are my favorite artists. My favorite two characters are Thanos and Spawn. I would love to see Thanos visit the Predator's home world to take on a battalion of Predators, since he's always looking for war-like challengers. A Predator/Spider-Man crossover would be nice also. Could you guys get Marvel and Image to do a Thanos-Supreme cross-over? That would be awesome.

Leroy Farris Offlee
Universal City, TX

Leroy, lets face it, Thanos could beat the crap out of fifty Predators or Supremes. Spidey and Predator? Now that's a different story . . . hmmmm. Even if the Predator were invisible, Spidey does have that Spidey-sense of his. This could get interesting . . . —VV

Dear Vantage Viewpoints,

I have been ordering your book for a while now and I am glad to see that it is now packed with lots more information than before. I am especially pleased with your great picks which have led me to hot comic books, like the first Ultraverses, **Moon Knight** #55, the Plasm Binder, and many more. Well thank you for taking your time to read this letter and by the way I recommend all Valiant books as great reading picks.

Ruben Carrera
Chicago, IL

Dear Vantage,

Well, let's start off by answering your questions:

1) The new mag . . . In one word, COOL!
2) The poem . . . It's not that bad. I've written worse.
3) Prices in your area . . . they're pretty reasonable actually.
4) Comics take up too much space . . . Well, I've recently started buying comics a year ago, and I'll tell you what, it's hard to find a safe place to keep them. But, I've had to throw a lot of stuff away (well, ok, it wasn't my stuff, but that's between you and me) and buy boxes.
5) Your favorite mag . . . VANTAGE!! VANTAGE!! VANTAGE!! 'Nuff Said!
6) Anything else . . . women and comic books.

I am a man of few words, but when I read your magazine I couldn't stop talking about it. I tell everybody that collects to read it if they want important information and inside tips. You guys keep up the excellent work!!

Matthew T. Wagley
Garden City, KS

Oh, Matthew, look what you did now . . . we're blushing. It's a good thing we're typing this and not reading it to you or you'd see our bright red faces live and in person. Seriously, our thanks go out to you and everyone else for your kind words and suggestions.

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